2. *To His Father:* ON THE DEATH OF LA BOETIE

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER THAT MONSIEUR DE MONTAIGNE THE COUNSELOR WROTE TO MONSEIGNEUR DE MONTAIGNE HIS FATHER CONCERNING CERTAIN DETAILS THAT HE NOTED IN THE ILLNESS AND DEATH OF THE LATE MONSIEUR DE LA BOÉTIE[8]

[1563(?)]

As for his last words, if any man is to give a good account of them, no doubt it is I: partly because all through his illness he was as glad to talk to me as to any other; and also because, owing to the unique and brotherly friendship that we had borne each other, I had a very certain knowledge of what he had intended, judged, and willed during his life, no doubt as great as one man can have of another. And because I knew this to be lofty, virtuous, full of very certain resolution, and in short admirable, I readily foresaw that if illness left him the power to express himself, nothing would escape him in such a necessity but what was great and full of good example. Thus I was as attentive as I could be.

It is true, sir, that since my memory is very short and was further disturbed by the confusion that my mind was to suffer from so heavy and important a loss, it is impossible that I have not forgotten many things that I would like to be known. But those I have remembered I shall report to you as truthfully as I can.

For to portray him thus proudly steadfast in his brave demeanor, to make you see that invincible courage in a body struck down and battered by the furious attacks of death and pain, would require, I confess, a far better style than mine. Because although whenever he spoke about weighty and important matters during his life, he spoke about them in such a way that it would have been hard to write them so well, yet at this point it seemed that his mind and tongue were vying in their effort, as if to do him their ultimate service. For without a doubt I never saw him so full of such beautiful ideas or of such eloquence as he was all through this illness. Moreover, sir, if you find that I have tried to place in account his slightest and most ordinary remarks, I have done so on purpose. For, being said at that time, and in the thick of so great a task, they are a remarkable testimony to a soul full of repose, tranquillity, and assurance.

As I was returning from the Parlement on Monday, August 9, 1563, I sent to invite him to dine at my house. He sent word back that he thanked me but that he was feeling a bit poorly, and that I would give him pleasure if I would come and spend an hour with him before he left for Médoc. I went to see him soon after dinner. He was lying

[8] This account was published by Montaigne at the end of the volume of La Boétie's *Œuvres* late in 1570. By this time Montaigne's father was dead. It seems very likely that this is substantially a letter written by Montaigne to his father soon after La Boétie died, in August 1563.

down fully dressed, and already showed an indefinable change in his face. He told me that it was an attack of diarrhea with stomach pains, which he had contracted the day before in a game with Monsieur d'Escars when wearing his doublet under a silk gown, and that the cold often brought him such ailments.

I thought he was right to go ahead with the plan he had already made to go away, but that he should go no farther that evening than Germignan, which is only two leagues from town. I thought so because the place where he was staying had houses all around it infected with the plague, of which he was somewhat apprehensive, since he had recently returned from Périgord and Agenais, which had been all full of the plague when he left; and then, for an ailment like his, I had sometimes been much better off for a horseback ride. So he left, and with him his wife Madame de La Boétie and his uncle Monsieur de Bouilhonnas.

The next day, very early in the morning, one of his servants came to me on behalf of Madame de La Boétie, who informed me that he had felt very bad in the night from a violent dysentery. She was sending for a doctor and an apothecary, and asked me to come, as I did after dinner.

On my arrival, he seemed delighted to see me; and as I wanted to take leave of him and go back, and promised to see him again the next day, he asked me, with more affection and insistence than ever about anything else, to be with him as much as I could. This touched me considerably. Nevertheless I was leaving when Madame de La Boétie, who already had a vague premonition of some mishap, asked me, with tears in her eyes, not to go that evening. So she stopped me, and he rejoiced with me over this. The next day I went home, and on Thursday I went to see him again. His trouble was getting worse: his flow of blood and his stomach pains, which weakened him even more, were increasing from hour to hour.

On Friday I again left him, and on Saturday went to see him again and found him already very worn down. He told me then that his illness was a bit contagious and moreover unpleasant and melancholic; that he knew my nature very well and asked me to be with him only for short periods but as often as I could. I did not leave him again.

Until Sunday he had not talked with me at all of what he thought about himself, and we talked only about particular occurrences in his illness and what the ancient doctors had said about them; about public affairs very little, for I found him completely disgusted with them from the first day.[9] But on Sunday he had a spell of great weakness; and when he had recovered consciousness, he said that he had seemed to be in some great confusion of all things and had seen nothing but a thick cloud and a dense fog in which everything was pell-mell and without order. However, he was not painfully affected by this acci-

[9] La Boétie died in the second year of the French religious civil wars. His "Memoir on the Edict of January 1562" shows his deep concern with the problem and his sense of the necessity of religious unity.

dent. "Death has nothing worse about it than that, my brother," I said to him then. "Why," he replied to me, "it has nothing as bad about it."

From then on—because, from the beginning of his illness, he had had no sleep, and in spite of all the remedies he kept always getting worse, so that they had already tried certain potions on him which they use only in the last extremities—he began to lose all hope of cure, and told me so.

This same day, because it was judged suitable to do so, I said to him that because of the extreme friendship I bore him, it would be unbecoming to me if I did not take care that, as all his actions in health had been seen to be as full of wisdom and good counsel as those of anyone else in the world, he should continue them still in his sickness; and that if God willed that he get worse, I would be very sorry if for lack of advice he should leave any of his domestic affairs at loose ends, both because of the damage that his relatives might suffer from this and for the sake of his reputation. He accepted this from me very graciously, and after making up his mind about the difficulties that had kept him undecided in this matter, he asked me to call his uncle and his wife, and no others, to have them hear what he had planned about his will. I told him that he would alarm them. "No, no," he said to me, "I will console them, and give them much better hope for my health than I have myself."

And then he asked me whether the faint spells he had undergone had not alarmed us a little: "That is nothing, my brother," I said; "these are accidents common in such illnesses." "Indeed it is nothing, my brother," he replied, "even if what you feared the most were to happen." "It would be nothing but happiness for you," I answered, "but the loss would be mine, for I would lose the company of so great, so wise, and so sure a friend, such a friend that I would be certain never to find another like him."

"That might well be, my brother," he said; "and I assure you that what makes me take such care as I do for my cure, and not hurry so much to complete the passage that I have already half completed, is the consideration of your loss and of that of this poor man and this poor woman (speaking of his uncle and his wife), both of whom I love with all my heart, and who will find it very hard, I am certain, to bear the loss they will suffer in me, which in truth is very great both for you and for them. I am considering also the unhappiness that will be felt by many good people who have loved and esteemed me during my life, whose society indeed, I confess, if I had my choice, I would still be happy not to lose. And if I am going away, my brother, I beg you, who know them, to bear witness to them of the good will I have borne them even to this last limit of my life. And then, my brother, perhaps I was not born so useless as not to have the means of doing some service to the commonwealth. But however that may be, I am ready to leave when it shall please God, being fully assured that I shall enjoy the bliss that you predict for me. And as for you, my friend, I know you to be so wise that whatever your loss, you will still adapt yourself

willingly and patiently to whatever His Holy Majesty shall be pleased to decree about me; and I beg you to see to it that grief over losing me does not drive this good man and that good woman beyond the bounds of reason."

Then he asked me how they were behaving now. Well enough, I told him, in view of the importance of the matter. "Yes," he went on, "now, when they still have a little hope. But if once I have taken it all away from them, my brother, you will have a very hard time restraining them." For this reason, as long as he lived thereafter, he always concealed from them his opinion that his death was certain, and entreated me very urgently to do the same. Whenever he saw them around him, he put on the most cheerful manner and fed them with fine hopes.

At this point I left him to go and call them. They composed their faces as well as they could for a time. And when we had all sat down around the bed and the four of us were alone, he spoke thus, his face calm and as if delighted:

"My uncle, my wife, I assure you on my word that no new stroke of my illness or bad opinion I have of my cure has put it into my head to have you called in order to tell you what I plan. For, thank God, I feel very well and am full of good hope. But having learned long ago, both by long experience and by long study, what little security there is in the instability and inconstancy of human affairs and especially in our life, which we hold so dear, and yet which is but smoke and a mere nothing; and considering also that since I am sick I have come that much closer to the danger of death, I have decided to put some order into my domestic affairs, after first getting your opinion about them."

And then, addressing his remarks to his uncle, he said: "My good uncle, if at this time I had to give you an account of the great obligations I have to you, I would not have done for some time. It is enough for me that to this day, wherever I have been and no matter to whom I have spoken about it, I have always said that everything a very wise, very good, and very liberal father could have done for his son, you have done all that for me, both in the care that was needed to instruct me in humane letters, and when you were pleased to push me into public employment; so that the whole course of my life has been full of great and commendable friendly services from you. In short, whatever I have, I hold from you, I so acknowledge it, I am indebted to you for it; you are my true father. Thus, as the son of the family, I have no right to dispose of anything unless you are pleased to give me leave to do so."

Then he was silent, and waited until sighs and sobs gave his uncle a chance to answer him that he would always regard as very good whatever his nephew pleased. Then, in order to make his uncle his heir, he begged him to take from him the property that belonged to him.

And then, turning his words to his wife, he said: "My likeness (so he often called her because of some ancient affinity between them), having been joined to you by the holy bond of marriage, which is one of the most respectable and inviolable that God has ordained for us

here below for the maintenance of human society, I have loved, cherished, and esteemed you as much as I possibly could, and I am quite certain that you have rendered me reciprocal affection, which I cannot sufficiently acknowledge. I beg you to take what I give you of my goods and be content with it, even though I well know that it is little in comparison with your merits."

And then, turning his words to me, he said: "My brother, whom I love so dearly and whom I chose out of so many men in order to renew with you that virtuous and sincere friendship, the practice of which has for so long been driven from among us by our vices that there remain of it only a few old traces in the memory of antiquity, I entreat you to accept as a legacy my library and my books, which I give you as a sign of my affection toward you: a very small present, but one which comes from a willing heart and which is appropriate for you because of your fondness for letters. It will be μνημόσυνον *tui sodalis.*"[10]

And then, speaking to all three of us in general, he praised God that in such extreme need he found himself in the company of all the dearest persons he had in this world, and said that it seemed to him very beautiful to see a gathering of four persons so in accord and so united by friendship, for he was assured that we loved one another unanimously for each other's sake. And having recommended us to one another, he went on thus: "Having set my estate in order, now I must think of my conscience. I am a Christian, I am a Catholic; as such have I lived, as such do I intend to end my life. Let a priest be sent for, for I will not fail in this last duty of a Christian."

At this point he finished his speech, which he had carried through with such assurance on his face and such strength in word and voice, that whereas I had found him, when I came into his room, weak, dragging out his words slowly one after the other, his pulse very low as with a slow fever, and drawing toward death, his face pale and all subdued, it now seemed that, as if by a miracle, he had just gained some new vigor: his color ruddier, his pulse stronger, so that I had him feel mine to compare them. At that moment my heart was so sad that I could not answer him.

But two or three hours later, both to keep up his great courage, and because I wished, in the zeal I have had all my life for his glory and honor, that there should be more people in his room to witness so many fine proofs of greatness of soul, I told him that I had blushed for shame that my courage had failed on hearing what he, who was suffering this illness, had had the courage to tell me. That up to then I had thought that God gave us no such great power against human calamities, and I had had difficulty believing what I had come across on this subject in the histories; but that having felt such a proof of it, I praised God that this had been in a person by whom I was so loved and whom I loved so dearly; and that this would serve me as an example, to play this same part in my turn.

[10] "A remembrance of your friend" (adapted from Catullus).

He interrupted me to beg me to use it in this way, and to show in action that the talks we had had together during our health had been not merely borne in our mouths but deeply engraved on heart and in soul, in such a way as to be put into execution on the first occasions that offered; adding that this was the true object of our studies, and of philosophy. And, taking me by the hand, he said: "My brother, my friend, I assure you that I have done many things in my life, it seems to me, with as much pain and difficulty as I do this. And when all is said, I had been prepared for it for a very long time and had known my lesson all by heart. But have I not lived enough up to my present age? I was soon to be thirty-three. God granted me this grace, that all my life up to now has been full of health and happiness. In view of the inconstancy of things human, that could hardly last any longer. Henceforth it would have been time to get down to business and to see a thousand unpleasant things, like the disadvantages of old age, of which by this means I am quit. And then it is likely that up to this time I have lived with more simplicity and less malice than I would perhaps have done if God had let me live until the concern with getting rich and improving my affairs came into my head. As for me, I am certain that I am going away to find God and the abode of the blessed." And because I showed, especially in my face, that I could hardly bear to hear him, he said to me: "What, my brother, do you want to put fear into me? If I felt fear, who but you should take it away from me?"

In the evening, when the notary arrived who had been sent for to receive his will, I had him put it in writing, and then asked Monsieur de La Boétie whether he did not want to sign it. "Not sign it," said he, "I want to make it myself. But, my brother, I would like to be given a little leisure, for I find myself extremely weary and so weak that I can hardly do a thing more." I started to change the subject, but he recovered himself suddenly and said to me that it did not take much leisure to die, and asked me to find out whether the notary had a good swift hand, for he would not make many stops in dictating. I called the notary, and on the spot he dictated his will so fast that it was very hard for the man to follow him. And when he had finished he asked me to read it to him, and, speaking to me, he said: "That's a fine thing we care for, our riches! *Sunt haec quae hominibus vocantur bona.*"[11] After the will had been signed, since his room was full of people, he asked me if it would do him any harm to talk. I told him no, but that he should speak very softly.

Then he sent for Mademoiselle de Saint-Quentin, his niece, and spoke to her thus: "My niece, my dear, since I have known you[12] I have always thought I could see shining in you some traits of a very fine nature; but these last services that you perform with such kind affection and such diligence in my present hour of need show me great

[11] "Those are the things that by men are called good" (author unknown).

[12] La Boétie addresses his niece, a young girl, as *tu*. He uses *vous* to all the others, and they to him.

promise in you; and truly I am obliged to you for this and thank you for it most affectionately. For the rest, for the discharge of my conscience, I admonish you to be first of all devout toward God. For without a doubt that is the main part of our duty, without which no other action can be either good or fine; and if that part is really sincere, it draws after it necessarily all other virtuous actions. After God, you must love and honor your father and mother, especially your mother, my sister, whom I esteem one of the best and most sensible women in the world; and I beg you to take from her the example of your life. Do not let yourself be carried away by pleasures. Flee like the plague those mad intimacies in which you sometimes see women indulge with men. For even though at the beginning these may have nothing bad about them, yet little by little they corrupt the mind and lead it to idleness, and beyond, into the ugly mire of vice. Believe me, the surest guardian of a girl's chastity is austerity. I pray you and want you to remember me because you often had before your eyes the affection I have borne you, but not to complain and grieve over my loss; and this I forbid to all my friends as much as I can, since it would seem that they were envious of the good which, thanks to my death, I shall soon find myself enjoying. And I assure you, my dear girl, that if at this moment God gave me a choice either to return and live on or to finish the journey I have begun, I would have a very hard time choosing. Farewell, my dear niece."

After that he sent for Mademoiselle d'Arsac, his stepdaughter, and said to her: "My daughter, you have no great need of my advice, having such a mother, whom I have found so wise and so well suited to my nature and my wishes, and who has never failed me in anything. You will be very well instructed by such a schoolmistress. And do not think it strange if I, who am not at all related to you by blood, care and am concerned about you. For since you are the daughter of a person who is so close to me, it is impossible that whatever concerns you should not concern me too. And therefore I have always shown fully as much concern for the affairs of Monsieur d'Arsac, your brother, as for my own. And perhaps it will not hurt your advancement that you have been my stepdaughter. You have wealth and beauty enough, you are a gentlewoman of good family. All you need is to add to these the riches of the mind, which I beg you to be willing to do. I do not forbid you the vice that is so detestable in women, for I refuse even to think that it can come into your mind—indeed I believe the very name of it is horrible to you. Farewell, my stepdaughter."

The whole room was full of wails and tears, which nevertheless did not interrupt the train of his speeches, which were a little long. But after all this he ordered everyone to leave except his "garrison," as he called the girls who served him. And then, calling my brother Beauregard,[13] he said to him: "Monsieur de Beauregard, I thank you very

[13] Thomas de Montaigne, seigneur de Beauregard, second in age in his generation to Michel, born on May 17, 1534. Soon after the death of La Boétie he was married, for the second time, to La Boétie's stepdaughter, Jacquette d'Arsac, whom we have just met. He thus became lord of Arsac, Lilhan, Loirac, and Castera.

much for the trouble you are taking for me. Allow me to reveal something I have in my heart to tell you." When my brother had encouraged him, he went on thus: "I swear to you that of all those who have set about the reformation of the Church, I have never thought there was a single one who went about it with better zeal and more complete, sincere, and simple affection than you. And I certainly believe that it was only the vices of our prelates, which without a doubt need great correction, and certain imperfections that the course of time has brought into our Church, that incited you to this. I do not want to dissuade you from it now; for I do not readily ask anyone to do anything whatever against his conscience. But I do want to advise you, out of respect for the good reputation that the family you belong to has acquired by continual concord—a family that is as dear to me as any family in the world: Lord, what a family! from which there never has come any act other than that of a worthy man—out of respect for the will of your father, that good father to whom you owe so much, the will of your good uncle, and your brothers, to avoid these extremes. Do not be so sharp and so violent; accommodate yourself to them. Do not form a band and body apart; unite with them. You see how many ruins these dissensions have brought into this kingdom, and I warrant you they will bring much greater ones yet. And since you are wise and good, keep from bringing these disturbances into the midst of your family, for fear of making it lose the glory and the happiness that it has enjoyed until this hour. Take what I say to you about this in good part, Monsieur de Beauregard, and as a sure testimony of the friendship I bear you. For that is the reason I have held back until now from saying this to you. And perhaps because I say it to you in the state in which you see me, you will give more authority and weight to my words." My brother thanked him very heartily.

On Monday morning he was so ill that he had lost all hope of life, so that as soon as he saw me, he called me very piteously and said to me: "My brother, have you no compassion for all the torments I suffer? Don't you see that from now on all the help you give me serves only to prolong my pain?" Soon after this he fainted, so that they nearly gave him up for lost. Finally they revived him with vinegar and wine. But he could not see for a long time after, and, hearing us lament around him, he said to us: "My Lord, who is tormenting me so? Why do they take me out of that great pleasant rest that I am in? Leave me alone, I beg you." And then, hearing my voice, he said to me: "So you too, my brother, do not want me to be cured. Oh, what bliss you are making me lose!" Finally, having recovered still further, he asked for a little wine. And then, feeling better for it, he said to me that it was the best drink in the world. "Surely no," said I to get him talking, "water is that." "You're quite right," he replied, "ὕδωρ ἄριστον."[14] All his extremities, even his face, were already icy with cold, with a death sweat that ran down all along his body; and hardly any sign of a pulse could be detected any longer.

14 "Water is the best" (Pindar).

That morning he made confession to his priest; but the priest, because he had not brought everything he needed, could not say Mass to him. But on Tuesday morning Monsieur de La Boétie asked for him, to help him, he said, to perform his last duty as a Christian. Thus he heard Mass and received the Sacrament. And as the priest was taking leave of him, he said to him: "My spiritual father, I humbly entreat you all, both you and those who are under your charge, pray God for me—if it is ordered by the most sacred rolls of God's plans that I am now to end my days—that he have pity on my soul, and forgive me my sins, which are infinite, since it is not possible that so vile and base a creature as I can have carried out the commands of so lofty and powerful a master. Or, if it seems to him that there is still need of me here below, and he wants to reserve me for some other time, beg him to put a quick end to the anguish I suffer, and to grant me the grace to guide my steps henceforth according to his will, and to make me better than I have been."

At this point he stopped a bit to catch his breath; and seeing that the priest was going away, he called him back and said to him: "I want to say this also in your presence: I protest that as I have been baptized, as I have lived, so I want to die in the faith and religion which Moses first planted in Egypt, which the patriarchs then received in Judea, and which, from hand to hand, in the progress of time, has been brought into France." To look at him, it seemed that he would have talked even longer if he could have; but he stopped, begging his uncle and me to pray God for him. "For these," he said, "are the best services that Christians can do for one another." In speaking, he had uncovered one shoulder, and he asked his uncle to cover it up again, although he had a servant nearer to him. And then, looking at me, he said: *"Ingenui est cui multum debeas, ei plurimum velle debere."*[15]

Monsieur de Belot[16] came to see him after noon. Giving him his hand, he said to him: "My good friend, I was here on the point of paying my debt, but I have found a good creditor who has remitted it for me." A little later, as he woke with a start: "All right! All right! Let it come when it will, I'm waiting for it, strong and firm of foot"—words that he repeated two or three times during his illness. And then, as they were forcibly opening his mouth to make him swallow, he said, turning to Monsieur de Belot: *"An vivere tanti est?"*[17]

In the evening he began really to look like death; and as I was supping he had me called, having nothing left but the likeness and

[15] "It is the part of a noble mind to want to owe more to the man to whom we owe much" (Cicero).

[16] Jean de Belot, also a counselor in the Parlement of Bordeaux and a mutual friend. La Boétie had addressed one Latin satire to him and Montaigne (as against two to Montaigne alone) expressing the wish to flee the evil Old World for the New. In December 1567, Montaigne wrote him a letter to warn the Parlement of Protestant movements near Montaigne.

[17] "Is it so great a thing to be alive?" The source of this quotation has not been found. Montaigne later quotes it in the *Essays* (III: 13, p. 832).

shadow of a man, and, as he said about himself, *non homo, sed species hominis.*[18] And he said to me, with great difficulty: "My brother, my friend, please God I may see in reality what I have just seen in imagination!"

After waiting for a time while he no longer spoke but uttered piercing sighs in trying to speak (for from then on his tongue was beginning stubbornly to refuse to do its work), I said: "What are these visions, my brother?" "Great, great," he replied. "It never happened," I went on, "that I did not have the honor of sharing in all the ideas that came into your mind. Don't you want me to enjoy this honor still?" "Certainly I do," he replied, "but, my brother, I cannot express them: they are marvelous, infinite, and ineffable." We left it at that, for he could go no further. Thus a little earlier he had wanted to speak to his wife, and had told her, with the gayest face that he could put on, that he had a story to tell her. And he seemed to try to speak, but, his strength failing him, he asked for a little wine to restore it. It was to no avail, for he suddenly fainted, and for a long time could not see.

Being already very close to his death, and hearing the lamentations of Madame de La Boétie, he called her and spoke to her thus: "My likeness, you are tormenting yourself before it is time; won't you have pity on me? Take courage. Surely more than half the pain I bear is for the evil I see you suffer, not for my own; and with reason; for it is not properly we ourselves who feel the ills that we feel within us, but certain senses that God has placed in us; whereas what we feel for others we feel by certain judgment and the faculty of reason. But I am going off." This he said because his heart was failing him. Then, fearing that he had alarmed his wife, he recovered himself and said: "I am going off to sleep. Good night, my wife, go now." That was the last leave he took of her.

After she had gone, he said to me: "My brother, stay close to me, please." And then, feeling either the pangs of death sharper and more pressing, or the force of some hot medicine that they had made him swallow, he spoke in a louder and stronger voice, and tossed in his bed with the greatest violence; so that all the company began to have some hope, for until then it was weakness alone that had made us fear to lose him. Then, among other things, he began to entreat me again and again with extreme affection to give him a place; so that I was afraid that his judgment was shaken. Even when I had remonstrated with him very gently that he was letting the illness carry him away and that these were not the words of a man in his sound mind, he did not give in at first and repeated even more strongly: "My brother, my brother, do *you* refuse me a place?" This until he forced me to convince him by reason and tell him that since he was breathing and speaking and had a body, consequently he had his place. "True, true," he answered me then, "I have one, but it is not the one I need; and then when all is said, I have no being left." "God will give you a better one very soon," said I. "Would

18 "Not a man, but the semblance of a man" (author unknown).

that I were there already," he replied. "For three days now I have been straining to leave."

In this distress he often called me simply to know whether I was near him. Finally he began to rest a little, which confirmed us still more in our good hope; so that on leaving his room, I rejoiced at this with Madame de La Boétie. But an hour later, or thereabouts, speaking my name once or twice and then heaving a great sigh to himself, he gave up the ghost, at about three o'clock on the Wednesday morning, August 18th, 1563, after living 32 years, 9 months, and 17 days . . .

3. *To His Father:* DEDICATION OF MONTAIGNE'S TRANSLATION OF SEBOND

[June 18, 1568]

To Monseigneur de Montaigne[19]

Sir, in carrying out the task you set me last year at your home at Montaigne, I have cut out and trimmed with my own hand for Raymond Sebond, that great Spanish theologian and philosopher, a costume in the French style, and have stripped him, as well as I could, of that wild bearing and barbaric demeanor that you saw in him at first; so that in my opinion he has enough style and *savoir-faire* to present himself in any good company. It may well be that delicate and fastidious persons will note here some Gascon trait and habit; but it will be the more to their shame for having by their carelessness let a man get ahead of them in this who is a complete novice and apprentice at such a task.

Now, sir, it is right that he should come to the light of day, and progress in favor, under your name, since to you he owes all the improvement and correction he has here. However, I clearly see that if you are pleased to have a reckoning with him, it will be you that will owe him much in the end. For in exchange for his excellent and very religious arguments, his lofty and as it were divine conceptions, it will turn out that you for your part have brought to him only words and language: a merchandise so vulgar and so vile that the more of it a man has, the less, peradventure, he is worth.

Sir, I pray God to give you a very long and very happy life.

Your very humble and very obedient son.

From Paris, June 18th, 1568.

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

[19] Montaigne had translated Sebond's *Liber Creaturarum, sive Theologia Naturalis,* as *Théologie naturelle,* at his father's request. In the early pages of his "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (*Essays* II: 12, pp. 319–20) he speaks in a very deprecatory way of the work and suggests that he did the thousand-page translation in a few days. The letter above is dated from Paris on the very day his father died.

4. *To Henri de Mesmes:* DEDICATORY EPISTLE TO LA BOÉTIE'S TRANSLATION OF PLUTARCH'S "RULES OF MARRIAGE"

[April 30, 1570]

To Monsieur de Mesmes, Lord of Roissi and Malassise, Councillor to the King in his Privy Council[20]

Sir, one of the most notable follies that men commit is to employ the strength of their understanding to smash and ruin common and accepted opinions which bring us satisfaction and contentment. For whereas everything under heaven employs the means and instruments that nature has placed in its hands for their proper use, the profit and advantage of its own being, these people—in order to seem to have a livelier and more alert mind, one that receives and lodges in it nothing that is not tested and weighed a thousand times by the subtlest powers of reason—stir up their soul out of a peaceful and restful posture in order in the end to fill it, after a long quest, with doubt, uneasiness, and feverishness. It is not without reason that childlikeness and simplicity have been so recommended by truth itself.[21] For my part I prefer to be more at ease and less able, more happy and less understanding.

That is why, sir, although the clever ones make fun of our concern for what will happen here after us, since our soul will be lodged elsewhere and no longer affected by things here below, yet I think it is a great consolation to the frailty and brevity of this life to believe that it can be strengthened and prolonged by reputation and renown, and I very willingly embrace an opinion so pleasant and favorable, which is inborn in us, without anxiously inquiring how or why this can be.

So that, having loved above all else the late Monsieur de La Boétie, the greatest man of our time, in my opinion, I would think I was grossly failing in my duty if I wittingly let a name as rich as his and a memory so worthy of commendation vanish and be lost, and if I did not try, by those same parts of him, to revive him and bring him back to life. I do believe that he has some sense of this and that these services of mine affect him and give him joy. In truth, he is still lodged in me so entire and so alive that I cannot believe he is either so irrevocably buried or so totally removed from our communication.

Now, sir, because each new revelation I give of him and of his name is just that much of a multiplication of this second life of his, and, moreover, because his name is ennobled and honored by the place that receives it, it is up to me not only to spread it as much as I possibly can, but also to entrust it to the keeping of honorable and virtuous persons. Among these persons you hold such a rank that in order to give you an

[20] Henri de Mesmes (1532–96), seigneur de Roissi et de Malassise, chancellor of the kingdom of Navarre, eminent jurist, public servant, and patron of letters.

[21] That is, by the Bible. Montaigne's anti-Protestant argument here anticipates those in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (*Essays* II:12).

occasion to take in this new guest and give him a warm welcome, I have decided to present you with this little work, not for any service that you might derive from it, for I know well that you have no need of an interpreter in order to frequent Plutarch and his companions; but it is possible that Madame de Roissi,[22] seeing the order of her household and of your fine concord represented here to the life, will be very pleased to learn that the goodness of her natural inclination has not only attained but surpassed all that the wisest philosophers have been able to conceive about the duty and laws of marriage. And, at all events, it will always be an honor to me to be able to do anything that proves a pleasure to you or yours, because of the obligation I have to render you service.

Sir, I pray God to give you a long and very happy life.
From Montaigne, April 30th, 1570.
Your humble servant,

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

5. *To Michel de L'Hôpital:* DEDICATORY EPISTLE TO LA BOÉTIE'S LATIN "POEMS"

[April 30, 1570]

To Monseigneur de L'Hôpital, Chancellor of France[23]

Sir, it is my opinion that you men into whose hands both fortune and reason have placed the government of the world's affairs seek nothing more assiduously than a way to attain a knowledge of the men in the public offices under you. For there is hardly any community so sickly as not to have plenty of men in it to supply each of its offices adequately, provided that the selection and apportionment could be justly made. And if that point were gained, nothing further would have to be done to attain the perfect composition of a state.

Now, the more desirable this is, the more difficult it is also, since your eyes can neither reach so far as to pick and choose among a multitude so great and so spread out, nor penetrate to the depths of men's hearts to see their intentions and their conscience, the main parts to be considered; so that there has never been a commonwealth so well established that we did not often observe in it a weakness in this choice and this apportionment. And in those in which ignorance and malice, disguise, favors, intrigues, and violence are in command, if some selection is made according to order and merit, we doubtless owe this to for-

[22] Jeanne Hennequin, third cousin of her husband, married to him since 1552.
[23] Michel de L'Hôpital (1503–73), a great moderate statesman, chancellor of France since 1560, had resigned in 1568 in protest at the prevalence of violence and corruption. He was a fine Latin poet and patron of poetry.

tune, which, by the inconstancy of its varied movement, has for once found itself in the path of reason.[24]

Sir, this consideration has often consoled me, for I know that Monsieur Etienne de La Boétie, one of the men most fit and needed for the highest offices in France, lived all his life, stagnating and underrated, by the ashes of his hearth at home, to the great detriment of our commonwealth; for as regards himself, I tell you, sir, that he was so abundantly furnished with the goods and treasures which defy fortune that never did a man live more satisfied or more content. To be sure, I know that he rose to those local dignities that are considered great; and I also know that never did a man bring to them more ability, and that at the age of thirty-two, when he died, he had acquired more true reputation on that level than any man before him. But the fact remains that it is unreasonable to leave a worthy captain in the status of common soldier, and to employ in modest positions those who would also do well in the highest. In truth, his powers were put to poor and insufficient use; so that, beyond the needs of his office, he had many great talents left over, idle and useless, from which the commonwealth could have derived service, and he himself glory.

Now, sir, since he was so careless about pushing himself into the public eye (for unfortunately virtue and ambition rarely dwell together), and since he belonged to an age so thick-witted or so full of envy that he could not be aided at all by the testimony of others, I am prodigiously eager that at least his memory after him, to which alone from now on I owe the good offices of our friendship, should receive the reward of his merit and be well lodged in the good opinion of honorable and virtuous persons.

For this reason I have wanted to place him in the public eye and to present him to you, sir, by these few Latin verses that he left us; in the opposite way from the mason, who places the handsomest part of his building toward the street, and the merchant, who makes a show and display of the richest sample of his wares. What was most commendable in him, the true juice and marrow of his worth, has followed him, and all we have left is the bark and the leaves. The man who could bring out the disciplined movements of his soul, his piety, his virtue, his justice, the liveliness of his mind, the weight and soundness of his judgment, the loftiness of his conceptions, so far elevated above those of the vulgar, his learning, the graces that were ordinary companions of his actions, the tender love he bore to his wretched country, and his mortal and sworn hatred of every vice, but especially of that ugly traffic that is hatched under the honorable name of justice—that man would certainly engender in all good men a singular affection for him, mingled with a prodigious regret for his loss. But, sir, this is far beyond my powers, and moreover he never thought of leaving any evidence to posterity even of the fruit of his studies; and all we have left is what he wrote upon occasion by way of pastime.

[24] This last clause is virtually the title of one of the *Essays* (I:34).

Be that as it may, I beg you, sir, to give him a friendly reception, and—as our judgment often infers something very great from something trivial, and as the very sports of great personages reveal to the clear-sighted some honorable mark of the rank from which they come—to rise through this work of his to the knowledge of him, and consequently to love and embrace his name and his memory. In so doing, sir, you will only be making return in kind for the very decided opinion he had of your virtue, and thus you will be accomplishing what he infinitely desired during his life. For there was not a man in the world in whose acquaintance and friendship he would rather have been lodged than in yours.

But if anyone is scandalized at my making such bold use of another's property, I tell him that no spoken or written statement in the schools of philosophy ever represented the rights and duties of sacred friendship as exactly as did the practice that my friend and I formed together.

For the rest, sir, this slight present, to kill two birds with one stone, will also serve, if you please, as testimony of the honor and reverence that I have for your ability and for the unique qualities that are within you. As for those that are external and fortuitous, it is not my way to place them in account.

Sir, I pray God to give you a long and very happy life.

From Montaigne, April 30th, 1570.

Your humble and obedient servant,

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

6. *Notice to the Reader of La Boétie's Translations*

[August 10, 1570]

NOTICE TO THE READER[25]

Reader, you owe to me all that you enjoy of the late Monsieur Etienne de La Boétie; for I tell you that for his own part, there is nothing here that he would ever have hoped to show you, or indeed that he considered worthy of bearing his name in public. But I, who am not so high-handed, finding nothing else in his library, which he left me in his will, still did not want this to be lost. And from what little judgment I have, I am hopeful that you will find that the very ablest men of our time very often make much ado about slighter things than this. I understand from those who knew him younger than I did, for our acquaintance began only about six years[26] before his death,

[25] Because the undated letter to Lansac (No. 7) preceded this in the volume in which they were published, Armaingaud infers that it was composed later.

[26] In his chapter "Of Friendship" (I: 28, p. 143) Montaigne speaks of the friendship as lasting four years; he had earlier written "four or five years."

that he had written many other Latin and French verses, as for example under the name of Gironde, and I have heard him recite some rich bits of these. Indeed, the man who wrote "The Antiquities of Bourges"[27] quotes some which I recognize. But I do not know what has happened to them all, or to his Greek poems. And in truth, as each sally came into his head, he discharged it on the first piece of paper that came to hand, with no further care for preserving it.

Be assured that I have done what I could, and that in the seven years since we lost him I have been able to recover only what you see here, except for a "Discourse on Voluntary Servitude" and some Memoirs concerning our troubles over the Edict of January 1562.[28] But as for these last two pieces, I find their fashion too delicate and elegant to abandon them to the gross and heavy air of so unpleasant a season. Farewell.

From Paris, August 10th, 1570.

7. *To Louis de Lansac:* DEDICATORY EPISTLE TO LA BOÉTIE'S TRANSLATION OF XENOPHON'S "OECONOMICUS"

[1570(?)]

To Monsieur de Lansac, Knight of the Order of the King, Councillor in his Privy Council, Superintendent of his Finances, and Captain of a hundred gentlemen of his household[29]

Sir, I send you the "Oeconomicus"[30] of Xenophon, put into French by the late Monsieur de La Boétie: a present that has seemed to me well suited to you, both because it sprang originally, as you know, from the hand of a notable gentleman, a very great man in both war and peace, and because it received its second form from this person, whom I know you loved and esteemed while he lived. This will always serve you as a spur to continue your good opinion and good will toward his name and his memory. And to speak boldly, sir, do not be afraid to find your

[27] Jean Chaumeau, who quotes some of La Boétie's verses in his "History ot Berry" (Lyons, 1566).

[28] Montaigne had intended to publish the "Discourse on Voluntary Servitude" in his chapter "Of Friendship," but changed his mind presumably when it appeared in a Protestant publication. See *Essays* I: 28, p. 144 and note 2.

The "Memoir on the Edict of January 1562" was a judicious but firm criticism of the government's policy of tolerance and compromise, which Montaigne presumably did not publish in order not to add fuel to the fires of civil hatred. It was published in book form by Paul Bonnefon in 1922.

[29] Louis de Saint-Gelais, seigneur de Lansac or Lanssac (1512–89), eminent adviser and tutor to royalty, ambassador, and financial administrator. He had many dealings with the Parlement of Bordeaux while Montaigne was a member of that body. For his son Guy, see note 113 (Letter 29).

[30] Treatise on household management.

good feeling for him somewhat increased; for since your taste of him has been only from the public evidence he gave of himself, it is my duty to assure you that he had so many degrees of ability beyond this that you are very far from having known him whole and entire.

When he was alive, he did me the honor, which I count among my greatest good fortunes, of forming with me a bond of friendship so close and tight-knit that there was no slant, impulse, or motive in his soul that I was not able to consider and judge, at least unless my vision at times fell short. Now, without prevarication, taken all in all, he was so nearly a miracle that in order not to fly beyond the limits of plausibility and be completely disbelieved, I am obliged, in speaking of him, to restrain myself and say far less good than I know about him. And for the moment, sir, I will be content merely to entreat you, for the honor and reverence that you owe to the truth, to believe and bear witness that our Guienne has never come near seeing anything like him among the men of his robe.[31]

So, in the hope that you will render him this, which is very justly his due, and in order to bring him more freshly into your memory, I give you this book, which at the same time will also warrant you, for my part, that if my lack of ability did not expressly forbid me, I would be just as eager to present you with something of my own in recognition of my obligations to you and of the ancient favor and friendship that you have borne to the members of our family. But, sir, for lack of better coin, I offer you in payment a very steadfast will to do you humble service.

Sir, I pray God to maintain you in his keeping.

Your obedient servant,

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

8. *To Paul de Foix:* DEDICATORY EPISTLE TO LA BOÉTIE'S "FRENCH VERSES"

[September 1, 1570]

To Monsieur de Foix, Councillor to the King in his Privy Council and Ambassador from His Majesty to the Signory of Venice[32]

Sir, since I am in a position to recommend, to you and to posterity, the memory of the late Etienne de La Boétie, both for his extreme worth and for the singular affection that he bore me, it has occurred

[31] Men of the long robe, that is, of the legal profession.

[32] Paul de Foix (1528–84), long a counselor at the Parlement of Paris, in disfavor for a time under Henry II for his relative moderation, later an eminent public servant, adviser to Charles IX and Henry III, archbishop of Toulouse. A serious student of law and of letters, he was a good friend to Montaigne, who lamented his death in the *Essays* (III: 9, p. 731).

to me that it shows a very consequential lack of discrimination, deserving the constraint of our laws, to go about, as is commonly done, robbing virtue of glory, its faithful companion, and making a present of glory, without discrimination or judgment, to the first comer, according to our private interests; seeing that the two principal reins that guide us and keep us to our duty are punishment and reward, which concern us directly and as men only by means of honor and shame, inasmuch as these go directly to the soul and are sensed only by the inward feelings that are most our own; whereas even the animals are seen to be somewhat susceptible to all other, corporal kinds of reward and punishment. Besides, it is well to see that the custom of praising even the virtue of those who are no longer alive is not directed to them, but aims by this means to spur the living to imitate them, just as the ultimate punishments are employed by justice more for an example than for the correction of those who suffer them. Now since praise and dispraise correspond with each other and have consequences so comparable in importance, it is hard to justify the fact that our laws forbid us to damage the reputation of others and nevertheless allow us to ennoble it undeservedly. This pernicious license thus to toss to the winds as we wish the praises of one and all was once restrained in various ways in other places. Indeed it may have helped to put poetry in the bad graces of the sages. Be that as it may, at least there is no hiding the fact that the vice of lying always appears most unbecoming to a wellborn man, whatever face we put upon it.

As for this person I am speaking to you about, sir, he sends me far outside these conditions; for the danger is not that I may lend him some quality but that I may deprive him of some. And his bad luck will have it that whereas he has provided me, as well as a man can do, with very just and very manifest occasions for praise, I have just as little means and ability to render him his due—I indeed, to whom alone he communicated himself to the life, and who alone can vouch for a million graces, perfections, and virtues which molded idle in the midst of so fair a soul owing to the ingratitude of his fortune. For since the nature of things has allowed, I know not how, that however beautiful and acceptable truth may be of itself, yet we embrace it only if it is infused and insinuated into our belief by the instruments of persuasion, I find myself so very destitute both of the credit that might give authority to my simple testimony and of the eloquence to enrich it and set it off well, that I have come very close to giving up this whole effort, for I have not even anything of his left by which I can worthily present to the world so much as his mind and his learning.

In truth, sir, having been surprised by his destiny in the flower of his age and in a state of very happy and very vigorous health, he had never given less thought to anything than to publishing works that should testify to posterity what sort of a man he was in this respect. And perhaps he was strong enough, if he had thought about it, not to care very much about it. But finally I decided that it would be much more excusable for him to have buried with himself so many rare favors

of heaven than it would be for me to bury also the knowledge he had given me of them. And therefore, having assiduously collected everything complete that I found among his notebooks and papers scattered here and there, the playthings of the wind and of his studies, I thought best, whatever it was, to distribute and divide it up into as many parts as I could, in order thereby to take the occasion to commend his memory to all the more people, choosing the most notable and worthy persons of my acquaintance, and those whose testimony might be the most honorable to him; like you, sir, who may have had some knowledge of your own of him during his life, but certainly too slight to reveal how great was his full worth. Posterity may believe me if it please, but I swear to it upon all the conscience I have that I knew and saw him to be such, all things considered, that even in desire and imagination I could hardly reach beyond, so far am I from assigning him many equals.

I very humbly entreat you, sir, to assume the general protection not only of his name but also of these ten or twelve French poems, which cast themselves, as if out of necessity, under the shelter of your favor. For I will not conceal from you the fact that their publication was deferred after the rest of his works because up there[33] they did not consider them polished enough to be displayed to the public eye. You, sir, will see what the truth of the matter is. And because it seems that this judgment of theirs affects the interest of all this part of the country, from which they think nothing in the vernacular can come that does not have a wild and barbarous flavor, it is properly your responsibility—you who, to the eminence of a member of the first family of Guienne, which you received from your ancestors, have added on your own also the highest eminence in every sort of ability—to maintain, not only by your example but also by the authority of your testimony, that this is not always the case. And although doing is more natural to Gascons than saying, still they sometimes perform exploits with their tongue as much as with their arm, and with their mind as much as with their heart.

For my part, sir, it is not my quarry to judge of such things; but I have heard experts in learned matters say not only that these verses are worthy to appear on display, but that if you stop to consider the beauty and richness of the invention, they are in subject matter as meaty, full, and marrowy as any that have yet been seen in our language. Naturally each workman feels himself strongest in one certain part of his art, and the most fortunate are those who have seized upon the noblest part; for not all the pieces that are equally necessary to the construction of a building are therefore equally to be prized. Elegance of language, sweetness, and polish may perhaps shine more brightly in a few others; but in nobility of imagination, in the number of sallies,

[33] In Paris, where La Boétie's works were being published. Montaigne, after publishing the first lot, was writing this dedication from his château.

conceits, and nice touches, I do not think that any others surpass these. And moreover it should also be taken into account that this was neither his occupation nor his study, and that he hardly put his hand to his pen once a year, witness the little we have left from his whole life. For you see, sir, unseasoned and dry, all of his poetry that has come into my hands, without selection or choice, so that there is even some from his boyhood. In short, it seems as though he put his hand to it only to show that he was capable of doing anything. For as to the rest, thousands and thousands of times, even in his ordinary remarks, we have seen things come from him that were more worthy of being known, more worthy of being admired.

This, sir, is what reason and affection, joined together by a rare coincidence, command me to say to you about this great and good man; and if the liberty I have taken in addressing myself to you and talking to you so long about this offends you, please remember that the principal effect of greatness and eminence is to make you a target for the importunateness and involvement of other people's affairs.

Hereupon, after placing my very humble affection at your disposal, I pray God, sir, to give you a long and very happy life.

From Montaigne, September 1st, 1570.

Your obedient servant,

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

9. *To His Wife:* DEDICATORY EPISTLE TO LA BOÉTIE'S TRANSLATION OF PLUTARCH'S "LETTER OF CONSOLATION TO HIS WIFE"

[September 10, 1570]

To Madame de Montaigne, my wife

My wife, you understand very well that it is not the act of a gallant man, according to the rules of the present day, still to pay court and show affection to you. For they say that an intelligent man may well take a wife, but that to espouse her is for a fool to do.

Let us let them talk. For my part I hold to the simple ways of the old days—as indeed my hair is beginning to show. And in truth innovation[34] has been costing this poor state so dear up to now (and yet I do not know if the bidding will not go still higher), that in every way and every place I give it up. You and me, my wife, let us live in the old French way.

Now you may remember how the late Monsieur de La Boétie, that dear brother and inviolable companion of mine, gave me as he was

[34] Protestantism.

dying his papers and his books, which have since been the most treasured adornment of my library. I do not want stingily to enjoy them all alone, nor do I deserve that they should be useful only to me. For that reason I have wished to communicate them to my friends. And because I have, so I believe, none more intimate than you, I send you Plutarch's "Letter of Consolation to His Wife," translated by my friend into French. Indeed I am sorry that fortune has made this present so appropriate for you, and that having no child but a long-awaited daughter after four years of marriage, you had to lose her in the second year of her life.[35]

But I leave to Plutarch the charge of consoling you and advising you of your duty in this, begging you to believe him for my sake. For he will reveal to you my views, and what can be said in this matter, much better than I could myself.

With this, my wife, I commend myself very strongly to your good graces, and pray God to maintain you in his keeping.

From Paris, September 10th, 1570.

Your good husband,

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE